

Brian K. Peterson, ed. *Proclaiming the Gospel: Preaching for the Life of the Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009. 229 pages. \$20.

This is a collaborative work of essays by fourteen members of the faculty of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. Its intended audiences are preachers of the church and seminary students. The introduction, offered by the president of this seminary, Marcus Miller, indicates the purpose of the work is to offer “this collection of essays as our gift to the preachers of the church” (viii).

While this work is distinctively Lutheran in many respects, it also offers a useful ecumenical resource of reflections which relate preaching to all the varied disciplines of a seminary. The work discusses preaching under these four sections: I. Gospel Proclamation and its Purpose; II. Gospel Proclamation and Scripture; III. Gospel Proclamation and Context; and IV. Gospel Proclamation and the Life of the Church.

The two essays which lead off this work are from members of the Academy of Homiletics, Tom Ridenhour and Shauna K. Hannan. The former describes the basic biblical and confessional anchors which direct proclamation and also pinpoints a predominate problem in many homiletical classrooms and pulpits: what happens when God is not the subject of the sermon? In his usual pithy manner, he observes: “I hear so much preaching of oughts, musts, should, and conditionality as though my behavior determines what God will or will not do[there is] the lack of direct, clear, and unambiguous proclamation of the good news of what God has done, is doing and promises to do” (6,7).

Hannan’s essay, “Lutheran Preaching and the Third Use of the Law,” is perhaps the best, concise summary of this issue from a historical homiletical perspective that I have ever read. She takes up the various issues related to Law and Gospel from Lutheran history and asks readers to become aware of their preaching stance on this dynamic, particularly in terms of the issue of preaching law. She offers some sources by which preachers may address this issue: do we view the topic of the law from a confessional perspective? from Luther’s works? How might contemporary preachers address this?

This first section concludes with an essay by Michael Root, “Preaching Justification.” This is an enormous topic and one with increasing ecumenical implications, as Root notes in reference to Lutheran and Roman Catholic deliberations. Root defines justification this way: “to refer to a specific aspect of soteriology: justification concerns how the sinner is accepted by the righteous God” (25). This is indeed a solid Lutheran historical reading and definition. For those who pursue this topic doctrinally and biblically it would be interesting to put N. T. Wright¹ and New Perspectives scholars in dialogue with this essay. Additionally, Magnus Zetterholm’s latest summary of Pauline studies² offers a critique of this traditional Lutheran reading of justification, even moving beyond Wright and his school to other contemporary scholars and philosophers. This essay is part of a pervasive and fascinating conversation globally on how God and humanity relate to one another.

Another area of concern which students and preachers alike share is how to preach the Old Testament (or variously, the Hebrew Scriptures or the First Testament). Lamontte M. Luker’s argument in the essay, “Preaching the Gospel and the Law in the First Testament,” is two-fold: “to encourage the preacher to (1) hear the gospel in the Hebrew Bible, as well as its

law, and (2) to appreciate how the Hebrew Bible reflects real life as part of its value in preaching” (80). This essay would be of great assistance to many students who are nervous about texts which do not contain Jesus. As Luker notes: “Jumping to Jesus too quickly in a sermon may actually be a disservice to the text...” (86).

One essay which caught the eye of this English major was by H. Frederick Reisz, Jr., “Preaching and Evocative Objects for Faith Formation.” Reisz applies T. S. Eliot’s definition of the “objective correlative” to the work of the sermon. He says, “such a sermon evokes in the hearers a strongly predominating emotion or set of emotions appropriate to the intent of the sermon” (187).

This book can easily provide much useful information for the homiletics instructor, despite or perhaps because of the Lutheran heritage of proclamation so faithfully reflected therein.

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¹ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2009.

² Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student’s Guide to Recent Scholarship*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 2009.